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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether the authors of "The Brownies' Book," a magazine published in 1920-1921 for black children, achieved the seven goals they had set for themselves and whether the economic conditions of that period had an effect on the failure of the magazine. An analysis of the issues of the magazine reveals that the editors did achieve their goals, which were making black children (1) aware that being black was a natural condition; (2) familiar with the history and achievements of their race; (3) aware of the fact that other blacks had grown into intelligent, respected adults; (4) conscious of having a code of honor and action in their relations with white children; (5) fond of their own homes and companions; (6) receptive to the worthwhile activities in life; and (7) inspired to prepare for definite occupations. Because the United States was suffering from a post World War I economic depression, the publication was not financially successful, and although the magazine had many positive effects on black children, it ceased publication after 1921. (DF)

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TIMES OUT OF JOINT:

The Life and Death of The Brownies' Book

"Children of the Sun"
Dear little girl of tender years,
Born of a race with haunting fears, --
Cry not nor sign for wrongs done you,
Your cloud has silv'ry lining, too.

Dear little son, be not in gloom,
For fears this world has no more room;
God in His Wisdom gave you hue
Of which He's proud -- yes, proud of you!

- Madeline G. Allison
The Brownies' Book
May, 1920

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TIMES OUT OF JOINT:

The Life and Death of The Brownies' Book

Beginning with its October 1912 issue, The Crisis magazine, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), annually published in the same month what was to become its most popular and widely-read children's Crisis.

This "Children's Number," as it became known, was the brainchild of William Edward Burghardt DuBois. DuBois, historian, sociologist, scholar, educator, and editor-founder of The Crisis, by 1915 had "achieved the pinnacle of his leadership of black Americans and became...the most prominent prophet in the Negro race."[1]

It was partially through his pen and persistence as journalist and critic, hell-bent on achieving true democracy for blacks in America, that The Crisis (begun in 1910 with 1,000 copies) reached a national circulation of more than 100,000 by 1920. The Crisis was the first nationally-circulated magazine written by a black for black consumption."[2]

It was also through his pen and persistence that the "Children's Number" reflected one of the first attempts by a magazine published in the United States to pursue the task of educating the black child. Of his efforts, DuBois later wrote:

> The children's number became an annual reminder to the black people of America that children are rather important; that if we propose to conquer this earth for the principles of democracy regardless of race, and for the open door to genius regardless of color, we must not only bring children into the world, but we must train them after they come.[3]

It was recounted in the October 1919 children's number of The Crisis that a twelve-year-old reader had written a letter to DuBois in which she expressed desires to be better informed about her race. She also told of her bitterness after reading stories of the lynchings and riots consuming major cities in America at that time. Part of her letter said:

> I want to learn more about my race, so I want to begin early. I hate the white man just as much as he hates me and probably more.4

DuBois was startled by the potency and anger of the child's words. The objective of The Crisis, according to DuBois, was to "set forth facts and arguments which show the danger of racial prejudice, particularly as manifested toward colored people." This included reporting any and all atrocities committed against blacks. He expressed regrets that children would inevitably be exposed to these truths, but said the possible consequence of "raising them in ignorance of their identity and peculiar situation" was an even more horrifying reality.

According to DuBois, there was only one solution to this dilemma. He announced in the same issue, in which the child's letter appeared, plans to "publish hereafter not one children's number a year, but twelve."[5] The "Children's Crisis" was to become a precursor to a full-blown literary effort.

DuBois, The Crisis Business Manager Agustus Dill and Literary Editor Jessie Fauset formed a small publishing partnership based in New York City. They were to begin publishing the very next month "in cooperation with The Crisis, but as an entirely separate publication, a little magazine for

children -- for all children, but especially for ours, the children of the sun." DuBois explained that this magazine:

> .. will be called, naturally, The Brownies' Book, and as we have advertised, it will be a thing of Joy and Beauty, dealing in Happiness, Laughter and Emulation, and designed especially for Kiddies from Six to Sixteen.6

Due to a printers' strike, however, the publication of the magazine was delayed until January 1920.

The Brownies' Book, a monthly, 32-page, 8x10-1/2 sized publication, followed The Crisis' departmentalized format and used the same quality paper stock. On the last page of the first issue, there appeared in The Brownies' Book a poem written by literary editor Jessie Fauset heralding its appearance, and a very important aspect of its mission:

> To children, who with eager look
> Scanned vainly library shelf and nook
> For history or song or story
> That told the Colored People's glory --
> We dedicate the Brownies' Book.7

However earnest the intentions of its editors, the joy, beauty, happiness, laughter and emulation of The Brownies' Book were short-lived. On the cover of the December, 1921 issue, just two years after the start of publication, heavy type engulfed in white space replaced the usual lively artwork or poignant photographs. It read:

> This is the last Brownies' Book. For twenty-four months we have brought Joy and Knowledge to four thousand Brownies stretched from Oregon to Florida. But there are two million Brownies in the United States, and unless we got at least one in every hundred to read our pages and help pay printing, we knew we must at last cease to be. And now the month has come to say goodbye. We are sorry--much sorrier than any of you, for it has all been such fun. After all--we know--perhaps we shall meet again.

Just as boldly as DuBois and his partners hammered out The Brownies' Book's place in history, so too they delivered its epithet. For their efforts, there was left a legacy of The Brownies' Book, the first nationally-circulated children's magazine which sought to give to black children "a visibility, literature, political philosophy and direction nowhere apparent" in the United States at that time.[8]

In the final issue of The Brownies' Book, under the heading "Valedictory," was the editors' explanation for its discontinuation:

> ...The magazine was begun just at the time of industrial depression following the war, and the fault of our suspension therefore is rather in the times, which are so out of joint, than in our constituency.[9]

In protest of those times so out of joint, The Brownies' Book was created. At the hands of those times, it had succumbed. Some of the very same forces which spurred its manifesto were those which shunned its longevity.

This study focuses on the goals and objectives of The Brownies' Book and those sociological, historical and political ills of "the times" it addressed. It examines the editors' seven-point program of endeavors and will address the following questions:

1. Did the editors achieve what they set out to achieve?

2. To what extent did the "times out of joint" shape the contents of The Brownies' Book and contribute to its rise and fall?

"Times Out of Joint" - An Historical Overview

W.E.B. DuBois' censure of "times out of joint" in 1921 echoed his earlier practice of analyzing the times in which he found himself and 11 million other blacks. The publication of The Brownies' Book was to him a necessary measure of utmost importance. Through The Crisis and its offspring, The Brownies' Book, he could not only protest the times, but improve them.

In his on-going advocacy for citizenship rights and integration of blacks into the American society, DuBois' voice was among the many who epitomized the paradoxes of the times. In 1903, DuBois had written that there was a "strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century," and that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."[10]

He and other black leaders at the turn of the century emphasized political rights as a means of achieving an end to Jim Crow laws and the lynching of blacks across the country. White oppression of blacks reached one of its highest points between 1890 and 1920 -- a period when it was said that the black man "was pilloried in a virtual bacchanalia of racism."[11]

Blacks were systematically excluded from full participation in "the American dream." Jim Crowism was the term coined by whites to refer to laws passed by most states barring blacks from accommodation at most public places. They were also defranchised and downtrodden:

> Deprived of political power and the protection of law enforcement agencies, blacks faced a virtual reign of terror in the South during this period. Between 1882 and

> 1900 there were 3,011 lynchings in the United States. Most of them occurred in the South and an overwhelming majority of the victims were black.12

This picture did not improve much during the World War I era. This period, however was a major turning point in the history of blacks, for it was during this period that the "great migration" of blacks from the south to northern cities took place:

> The migration of Negroes from the rural South to the urban North became, after 1915, a mass movement. The gradual prewar influx from the border states gave way to a sudden, large-scale migration... While the earlier movement had been little noted outside of the Negro community, the new migration was charted and graphed, analyzed and evaluated, deplored and defended in the newspapers, on public platforms, and in legislative committees. It became one of the major social issues of the day.13

The antagonisms, hatreds and bigotry which had long characterized America, once more fell full-force on blacks. Large-scale race riots again erupted in many areas of the country:

> The movement of Negroes to their cities to take advantage of new economic opportunities was accelerated by the war. The closer contact between Negroes and urban whites accompanied by keen competition for jobs, housing, and status, resulted in violent conflict between the races in a number of communities between 1918 and 1921.14

The NAACP was an organization formed in 1910 to combat, through America's legal system, some of the bitter hostilities and racial doggery perpetrated against blacks. The impetus for its formation occurred after a race riot in Abraham Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Illinois. The new organization, with the exception of DuBois, had all white officers.

The Brownies' Book was born out of these times. The stage was set for a relentless attempt by black leaders to push

for massive social and political reform. The Brownies' Book was to be for the black child what The Crisis was for the black man and woman and those whites sympathetic to their plight. The Brownies' Book played a vital role in sustaining and encouraging this protest.

Point A - The Color Black

Accomplishing much of what it said it would do was one of the primary reasons The Brownies' Book became a pioneer among children's publications. Its primary purpose was to "teach universal love and brotherhood for all little folks, black and brown and yellow and white." Not overlooking the ages and natural inclinations of children, the editors of The Brownies' Book sought, as stated in the October 1919 issue of The Crisis, to entertain the children with "pictures, puzzles, stories, letters from little ones, clubs, games and oh--everything."[15]

Also, "deftly intertwined with the mission of entertainment," was a seven-point program or endeavors on which the editors of The Brownies' Book fashioned its contents.

The first point was to make black children understand that being "colored is a normal, beautiful thing." There were many ways in which the editors of The Brownies' Book endeavored to instill and encourage racial pride in its readers, for it seemed to them that most Americans had institutionalized policies to prevent them from realizing dreams of equality. The mass media was no exception:

> Northern newspapers, magazines and plays justified southern oppression of blacks, voiced approval of lynching, and generally showed that blacks were so stupid and morally degraded that they deserved an inferior place in society. White artists caricatured blacks in cartoons, paintings, advertisements, and post cards.16

The selection of the name, The Brownies' Book, was the editors' strongest statement of their understanding of the sensitive status of "color" in America. They wanted to help the black child accept and respect his color -- not in the derogatory sense in vogue during the turn of the century, but in a positive, loving way.

The name of the magazine also reflected the editors' attempt to abandon the negative stereotypes labeling the black child during those times. "Darkie," and "nigga" were just a few of the racial slurs commonly used to depict blacks. Rather than acknowledge the ill-conceived namecalling, "Brownies" was a midground of sorts. DuBois, in defining the issue of color consciousness in America, referred in The Brownies' Book to "black" and "brown" skin colors with equal reverence, dismissing for Brownies' readers the issue of a negative "color line."

There were many children's periodicals in circulation by 1920. The most well-known were St. Nicholas Magazine and The Youth's Companion. Each communicated the attitudes and values of a white, established, upper-class culture and were products of the slave period of the early nineteenth century. While the latter was more religion-oriented, the former's goal was to "make the spirit of St. Nicholas (Santa Claus) bright in each boy and girl in good, pleasant and helpful ways, and to clear away clouds

that sometimes shut it out."

The bright spirit of St. Nicholas enjoyed by white children, was not to shine on the black child of the early 1900s. For he and she were presented to white readers, in these same juvenile periodicals, as grave and pitiful shadow characters and "creatures not a part of his society, but 'something' apart." In children's periodicals, when mentioned at all, black children were depicted as zany cartoon characters -- buffoons and clowns -- who were objects of ridicule and niggardry. A review published by the New York Evening Post in 1921, however, applauded The Brownies' Book for being quite different; for it was:

> ...a book of Negro fairies and kings and queens and children. They are not the ridiculous 'pickaninny' types which have become a joke in literature. They are as pretty and real as real fairies and real children should be, yet they are dark because they are made by dark people, and for dark children and grown-ups.18

On the cover of its first issue was such a photograph of a "pretty and real" dark-skinned fairy.

The publication of numerous, large photographs was another means by which the editors sought to dispell the myth of the color issue. There were photographs of black children in pairs, children in schoolrooms, children on the streets protesting one cause after another, children at work and at play, and children in their "Sunday School finest." "Some Friends of Ours," was a feature which appeared regularly in The Brownies' Book."

The use of clear photographs of black children, many of them infants, had begun with the "Children's Number" of The Crisis. DuBois had grown up in a era when even the most educated whites were blindfolded by the racial superiority doctrines set

forth by white politicians and educators such as James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, Cole Blease and Ben Tillman of South Carolina, and Thomas Pearce Bailey of Georgia. The "Bailey Credo" was only one of the many laws and practices governing the actions and integration of blacks in mainstream America. According to the southern educator, the white race was to dominate over the Negro, who was inferior and was to remain so, for this was a white man's country without social or political equality for the Negro. He said that the lowest white man should count for more than the the highest Negro.[19] According to DuBois, too many Americans were of the belief, perhaps because of men such as Bailey, that the black man was genetically inferior -- physically and mentally.

DuBois did much to combat this mindset in The Brownies' Book. What he called "Our Baby Pictures," were real-life portraits intended to erase the fiction of the physical degeneracy of the American black and to depict a large class of well-nourished, healthy, beautiful children predominant among the "colored" people. He contended that:

> ....the whole argument of Negro haters has long said that health and physique among colored people was not a matter of nourishment and surroundings but of inescapable heredity ills. A glance at our pages will certainly help to show what arrant nonsense this thesis is.[20]

In addition to the publication of numerous photographs, which were popular among children and parents, there appeared regularly in The Brownies' Book a feature titled, "As the Crow Flies," which was designed to keep the children abreast of current events in America and abroad. The lovely black bird, who

thought so highly of himself, was said to be the voice of DuBois speaking to his youthful audience, encouraging their points of view of themselves. The first issue of The Brownies' Book personified a proud and beautiful image of the crow:

> The crow is black and O so beautiful, shining with dark blues and purples, with little hints of gold in his mighty wings. He flies far above the Earth, looking downward with his sharp eyes. What a lot of things he must see and hear and if he could talk-- and Lo, the Brownies' Book has made him talk for you.21

The strong emphasis on the color of the crow and his ability to correctly interpret "the times" was yet another way to drive home the point to the black, brown, yellow and white child that even "Crowism" in spite of the so-called "Jim-Crow" laws barring blacks from public facilities, voting, housing and legal privileges, could be viewed in a normal, natural way and possibly helped eliminated. One little "Brownie" wrote in the first issue of the magazine that "I hope someday that all detestable 'Jim-Crow' cars will be wiped out of existence, along with all prejudice, segregation, etc."[22]

Point B - History and Achievements

A Brownies' Book reader wrote to the editor in 1920:

> I read something in The Crisis about a mother sitting alone in despair, thinking about her children long ago lost to her. And it reminded me of another mother, our mother country, Africa, and it was that thought that forced me to write the enclosed poem, "Africa."23

This "Brownie" was learning to communicate the second point of the mission of the magazine which was "to make them familiar with the history and achievements of the race." This, too, was accomplished in several ways. Through the historical chronology

featured each month under "As the Crow Flies," readers of The Brownies' Book were informed not only of what had happened, but what was currently happening in blacks' struggle for freedom and equality in America. In the first issue, and as in each issue, the crow summarizes from his perspective many events. He said in 1920:

> What a year that 1918 was -- all blood and hurt and cries. Then came the year of the great peace, 1919... This year was two things: it was the year of the Great Peace and the 300th year since our black fathers settled in America.24

There were numerous attempts to teach history to the children. The Brownies' Book told its readers the importance of folk tales as an important historical device and many African fairy tales and proverbs were used to demonstrate the oral traditions of their mother country. One even explained the tales' purpose:

> Now here is a story about animals which African Fathers and Mothers tell to their little sons and daughters. The story is very old and has come down from father to son for many generations and has probably met with almost no changes. Such a story is called a folk tale.25

Most issues contained biological sketches of black historical figures -- lauding their accomplishments and lamenting their deaths. However, neither the life nor the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, another prominent black leader at the turn of the century who died in 1915, was ever summarized for Brownie readers. He and DuBois had become bitter enemies over which philosophy blacks should adopt. Washington believed that black should be educated for service-oriented jobs and embrace a philosophy of gradualism into the mainstream of American life. He insisted that even in the absence of political rights,

economic equality could prevail.[26] DuBois believed the opposite and espoused the philosophy of "The Talented Tenth," whereby blacks were to be educated to become community and political leaders and intellectuals.

Readers of The Brownies' Book also were exposed to full-page photographs of "real" and existing history-makers. In one issue was a photograph of Her Royal Highness Zaouditou, Queen of the Kings of Abyssinia, Empress of Ethopia. In others were black leaders of the Caribbean and South America.

Another history maker during the reign of The Brownies' Book was black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Garvey, who was born in 1887 in Jamaica, left his country to come to Harlem in 1916. By 1920 he'd established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to help direct the domestic politics of the United States and "to awaken and unite Negroes the world over." His platform was at immediate odds with "the times" and forces of America:

> We are the descendants of a suffering people; we are the descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer. We shall organize the 400,000,000 Negroes of the world into a vast organization to plant the banner of freedom on the great continent of Africa.[27]

Garvey's philosophy was not well received by DuBois, and there were few things in The Brownies' Book that encouraged black children to embrace Garvey's philosophy.

Point C - Beautiful, Useful, Famous

The third point, "to make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons"

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also was accomplished through the biographical information on historic men and women usually found under the title "A True Story." These life stories and educational sketches, usually written by guest columnists, told of such famous blacks as Katy Ferguson, Frederick Douglass, Crispus Attucks, Toussaint L'Overture, Phillis Wheatley, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Alexandre Dumas, Harriet Tubman, Denmark Vesey, Benjamin Banneker, Alexander Pushkin, Sojourner Truth and Blanche K. Bruce and Paul Cuffee. These were men and women who had in some way contributed to the advancement of the blacks in America. It was both a history lesson and a boost of encouragement.

Many of the black autobiographers also insisted that American blacks had to study the record of famous blacks in the ancient world in order to counter the white man's argument that blacks were naturally indolent, stupid, savage and inferior to whites.[28]

Much of the poetry in The Brownies' Book also placed events into historical context and let its readers know that they too could grow up to be special. One poem, titled "The Wishing Game," tells the story of three black children discussing who they wanted to be when they grew up. One picked Betsy Ross, the second Theodore Roosevelt. The third child had other ideas. He said:

> I'd be a Paul Dunbar or Booker Washington.
> The folks you named were good, I know
> But you see, Tom, each one
> Of these two men I'd wish to be
> Were colored boys, like you and me.

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So Sojourner Truth was colored, Bess,
and Phillis Wheatley, too.
Their names will live like Betsy Ross,
Though they were dark like you.[29]

In addition to the biographical sketches, The Brownies' Book contained an "educational number" that recorded the accomplishments of school children as well as "Brownie Graduates." The editors of the magazine solicited these reports in a number of ways and placed them under the regular feature "Little People of the Month." For example, the first column said:

> The BROWNIES' BOOK wants the pictures of all High School graduates, together with the name of the school and the course pursued. In the case of grammar school graduates, we can use only pictures of those who have done exceptional work, or stood at the head of their class. In fact, whenever you hear of anything that a colored child has done well, hasten to tell us.[30]

The total education of the black child was a major and reoccurring theme of The Brownies' Book. The magazine was quick in pointing to the "injustice and hypocrisy of whites who'd long barred them from educational institutions and then cited their ignorance as proof of their inequality."[31]

The Brownies' Book also exposed black children to blacks in other countries. In several issues were stories of children from the Philippines, Mexico, Russia, Poland and Ireland. DuBois' role as "The Crow" allowed him to fly over the entire world to select folktales and legends from Europe, Africa, and Latin America to illustrate the common bonds among "colored people," and to expose his young readers to other cultures.[32]
Many of the adventure stories about boys and girls were to

inspire the readers of The Brownies Book to seek out new ways of life, new ways of solving their problems and new ways to become famous individuals.

Point D - A Code of Honor and Action

In many of his writings in the children's number of The Crisis, DuBois continually expressed his dismay that white children in America were growing up with unrealistic images of black children. The fourth point of his seven-point program was "to teach black children a code of honor and action in their relations with white children." DuBois insisted that black children should be portrayed in the same types of activities and community affairs as white children. Therefore, black children were shown marching in the "Silent Protest Parade" in New York City in 1920.

In another issue, a parent told of how white children in the neighborhood would call her child, the only black in the neighborhood, unpleasant names. The parent did not know how to tell the child to answer the taunts and at the same time instill race love and race pride. The child, himself, answered the parent:

> Mother, the only way to fight these white people is to get an education and fight them with knowledge.33

Also many poems in The Brownies Book were messages to children of all races to understand the truth of brotherhood and democracy. In one article, "E Pluribus Unum," a young Irish lad was frustrated because he was not accepted as an American by other white children. The author told him to go back

and show the other boys "you are all Americans, as you fit in with old plans:"

> Black, brown, palefaced sons and daughters,
> Dared the Seven Seas' threatening waters.
> Have come here with strength, fire and youth,
> Understanding, every Truth.34

In the July 1919 issue in an article titled "America for All," a young white boy by the name of Sam and a brown boy by the name of Billy Boy discussed Uncle Sam and the army. The young white was encouraging. "Billy Boy, we's good 'Mericans, so me and you fer the U.S. Army," he said.[35]

At this point in history, the issue of blacks joining the armed forces was another point of contention, for they, too, were segregated reflections of Jim Crowism. Nevertheless, for several issues, The Brownies' Book carried an advertisement that asked parents: "Have you told your children of the part which Negro Americans played in the Great War?" A calendar produced by The Crisis carried pictures of black World War I heroes and their military citations.

Point E - Emulations, Ambition and Love

In several issues of The Brownies' Book, black children in photographs protested lynching and other oppressive measures being perpetrated on American blacks. The fifth point of the goals of the magazine was "to turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions." The editors of The Brownies' Book advertised their intent in the "Grown-Ups Corner," a regular feature of the magazine:

> The editors of the Brownies' Book would like pictures and accounts of the deeds of colored children...And letters. Do have your children write and tell us about their schools, their ambitions, their views of life in general. A great deal of wisdom comes from the mouth of babes.[36]

The second issue of the magazine had an ebony-colored bust of the face of an eleven-year old boy who had a strong, confident composure. Underneath was the inscription: "I Am An American Citizen."

The editors of The Brownies Book also sought to teach children courage and love in order for them to deal with a white society. They sought to avoid black children being "caught up in the confusing need to develop a viable self-image in a basically hostile environment in which their textbooks, daily newspapers, and national magazines gave them little reason to feel good about themselves and their progenitors."[37]

In addition, he initiated a feature in The Brownies' Book called "The Jury" in which letters were published from Brownies' readers to allow the public to be aware of their hurts, resentments and ambitions. One black child explained his pain in a letter:

> I was watching some men building a house, and I said to a boy there, "When I grow up, I am going to draw a lot of houses like that and have men build them." The boy was a white boy, and he looked at me and laughed and said, "Colored boys don't draw houses."[38]

The sender of the letter asked, "Why don't they, Mr. Editor?"

"The Crow" also had a lesson to teach Brownies' reader, that no matter how bad things became in their relationships with other white children, that:

> There is no place like home--none. None so good and none so bad: good because it belongs to us; bad because it is Ours to make better and this means Work and Eyesight. I, the crow, am Eyesight. I am Eyes. I see![39]

Point F - Amusements, Joys and Worth-While Things

There was also a regular feature in The Brownies Book called "Playtime," in which suggestions were given to readers on ways to have fun. It emphasized the sixth point of the magazine's purpose: "to point out the best amusements and joys and worth-while things of life." Not all was affected by the black child's status in America. There was a bit more to life than protest -- there was playtime.

This ideology of the editors found expression in the publication of reading games, family games, puzzles, sheet music, nursery rhyme dance programs, plays and proverbs. Editors of The Brownies' Book tried to enrich the lives of their readers by encouraging them to fully participate in games and other things of play. One Brownie wrote in "The Jury":

> My little sister had a birthday party the other night..., she said "I am going to get my games out of The Brownies' Book. And she did. I think she has played every game that you have ever published.[40]

In addition, the cover of the March, 1920 issue cover had a full-page illustration depicting fairies, gremlins, and Alice in Wonderland types -- only it was aimed at "True Brownies in Brownieland."

The fiction and poems in The Brownies' Book also addressed joys and amusements, as did the folktales, fables and legends and stories of princes and princesses from around the world. For

instance, in the first issue was a tale entitled "Pumpkin Land." It told the story:

> In the Land of Sure Enough, away down South, in a most wonderful land named Georgia, lives a little colored boy called Happy. He is fat and round as a brown cookie, with eyes like two round moons, and these eyes just sparkle.41

If one carefully reads the play features as well as the many fairy tales, it is not difficult to understand their underlying meanings. For example, one story describes the virtues of Ester, a very adventurous little girl whose "skin was brown and her hair was a shower of black curls. She was kind and loving to all she met."[42]

Helping to point out the joys and worthwhile things were parents of the Brownies who voiced their concerns in a special feature of The Brownies Book titled "The Grown-Ups' Corner." The editors wanted to reserve a small part of the magazines for parents because as they stated:

> This magazine is published for Children, but one understands the needs of children, or the problems that arise in their training, particularly in colored families, so well as their Parents. We want, therefore, the constant co-operation of parents, telling us what we ought to do, and what we ought to publish, and what we ought not publish.43

Point G - Occupations, Duties and Sacrifice

Another feature of The Brownies' Book was called "Little People of the Month." This section described the achievements of black children across the country who'd excelled in education, music, art, literature, drama, sports, business and community involvement. In the first issue of the publication, Brownies'

readers were asked:

> Wouldn't it be wonderful if every Child who reads the Brownies' Book should have a record like that of Lucile Spence? She came from South Carolina to New York City and has lived there eight years. When she graduated from grammar school out of a class of 150, she received the gold medal for the highest average in general excellence. But that was only the beginning of Lucile's career... Lucile is now in Hunter College getting ready to teach little readers of THE BROWNIES' BOOK.44

Thus, one of the efforts of the editors was to drive home the seventh purpose of their publication, "to inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice."

Another story described "a little businessman" named Roderick who at the age of eleven was a paperboy for some of the largest black newspapers in the country. The story said that every week Roderick:

> ...sells fifty copies of The New York News, fifty of the Amsterdam News and twenty-five or thirty of the Chicago Defender. Sometimes he sells monthly magazines and in the summer he peddles refreshments.45

In the regular feature "The Jury," were letters published from children asking for advice about "some of the things colored boys can work at when they grow up," placement in children's homes, how to prepare for a career in the newspaper and magazine business, and how to save money.

In addition to "Little People of the Month," "The Judge" featured an old, wise and kindly legal guardian giving advice to children on everything from making correct choices to being properly disciplined by parents. The judge gave "little lectures to Billikins, Billie and William, and their sisters who

had much prettier names and faces."[46] The children were admonished "to grow up to live a sane, temperate, well-balanced and efficient life." The judge also listened to the children who told him their hopes, aspirations and dreams.

Poems written by Brownies' readers also were published in each issue as were those of blackss Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, James Weldon Johnson and other notable writers who would excel at their craft during the Harlem Renaissance that was beginning to emerge at the time. One poem, written by Robert Louis Stevenson, described "the whole duty of children:"

> A child should always say what's true,
> And speak when he is spoken to,
> And behave mannerly at table,
> At least as far as he is able.[47]

The Brownies' Book was one of the first journals to publish the literature and art of many of these artists, such as Langston Hughes. According to DuBois, ninty-eight percent of all of the articles and art published in The Brownies' Book were written and drawn by black writers and artists.[48]

Summary of Seven-Point Program of Endeavors

DuBois, Fauset and Dill throughout the publication of The Brownies' Book were consistent in demonstrating most, if not all, of their seven goals in each issue of the magazine. The first issue is perhaps most reflective of the seven-point program. During the two years it was published, the editors of The Brownies' received hundreds of letters from Brownie readers and their parents attesting to their success. One of such letters came from a child in the Philippines. She wrote in 1920:

> ...I have an aunt in the United States and some times she sends me magazines. Last time she sent me a number of the The Brownies' Book. I was very pleased and delighted. I showed it to my teachers and friends. We had never seen a magazine with pictures of pretty colored children in it. I have told my aunt that I should like all the Brownies' Books I can get.49

Another Brownies' reader wrote in July of the same year:

> I want to tell you that I enjoy The Brownies' Magazine immensely. I am a little white girl; I am ten years old. I think the pictures of the little dark babies are sweet. I was especially interested in the pictures of those who did so much. I like the covers also.50

Conclusion

In the August 1920 issue was the first subtle hint of trouble for The Brownies' Book. In place of the usual introduction of the magazine on the inside cover, an advertisement appeared: "We are asking your help in securing subscribers and agents for The Brownies' Book, and next to it were letters from several readers asking for additional copies and information on distributing it. There was also an indication that not all subscribers had completed payment of the magazine, and a discount was offered for pre-paid subscriptions.

The Brownies' Book usually sold for 15 cents a copy, or $1.50 per year. The publishers of the magazine relied almost totally on subscription revenue, for there were only one or two pages of advertisements in The Brownies' Book. There were usually of an educational nature, pertained to The Crisis, or offered beauty-care information.

On the inside cover of the February 1921 issue of The

Brownies' Book, was this message:

> The Brownies Book has appeared monthly since the January, 1920 issue. Its circulation is still less than 5,000 copies per month. In order to keep the magazine at its present high standard -- as we are determined to do -- we must have at once 12,000 subscribers. Won't you help us now to reach that figure?

This was one goal the editors were never able to reach. In the valedictory statement appearing in the final issue of The Brownies' Book they wrote:

> ...we have for two years made the experiment of publishing at our own expense, THE BROWNIES' BOOK. The experiment has cost us about $7,000. The total revenue has been about $4,000, leaving us some $3,000 in debt. The total number of subscribers to THE BROWNIES' BOOK has gradually risen to 3,500 and it is increasing very slowly. The magazine cannot, however, pay expenses with less than 15,000 subscribers. As there is no prospect of getting this number of subscribers within less than four or five years we cannot afford to continue the experiment.51

Their inability to attain the number of subscribers needed to stay in business more probably than not was a result of the economic climate in America in general. Economic fluctuations of the times had become a major barrier for The Brownies' Book. The industrial depression following the war was singled out as the major culprit that contributed to the suspension of The Brownies' Book, and indeed the years between 1918 and 1921 were a time of recession, boom and depression.

When Germany surrendered in 1918, thousands of war workers found themselves out of jobs. A postwar slump lasted until it was followed by a slight boom in the early part of 1919 which began to taper off in early 1920. Wages declined, setting off a rapid succession of national strikes. Exports dropped, bankers reduced their lending policies and the deflationary spiral began.

Between 1920 and 1921 factory workers were sent home by the millions.[52] The majority of those displaced were blacks who had migrated to northern industrial centers seeking employment.

Neither DuBois nor Dill had been newcomers to business enterprising. Dill owned his own publishing company, and DuBois, prior to The Brownies' Book, had founded, edited and was part owner of two of three previous publications: The Moon (1906), The Horizon (1907), and The Crisis (1910). DuBois had even written in 1908 of the inability of blacks to financally support a black magazine:

> Newspapers and magazines for the general public have achieved national circulation by two methods: a high subscription price or multitudinous advertisements. Both of these methods are at present impossible for the Negro; we are a poor people.[53]

DuBois' words rang just as true thirteen years later. Although a large part of The Crisis subscribers were black, the time was not ripe for the same readership to support a children's magazine that was adapted to "colored children," and to all children who lived in a world of varied races.

The times were too "out of joint."

ENDNOTES

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